Intimate Information From the Realm of Make-Believe

Theda Bara Prophesies Need of Police Reserves To Handle Her Crowds

The morning after an exhausting première is not exactly the most appropriate time in the world for an interview. But Theda Bara, with the memory of the opening of "The Blue Flame" at the Shubert Theater vividly in her mind, was able to banish the nervous strain of the first night very quickly.

Theda Bara, so inevitably associated in the minds of all "movie fans" with the rôle of "vampire," has in her new play what she terms a bridge between the screen and the stage.

"It has been said," she began, "that this play was written expressly for me, but there were really four or five plays from which to choose. I knew that some people wanted to see me as a good little girl and that some other people wanted to see me as a bad little girl. 'The Blue Flame' gave me both rôles. It is a means of transition from the screen to the stage."

The first appearance in person since her great screen success probably brought disillusion to so many of her admirers as could crowd themselves into the theater on the opening night. Laughingly, Miss Bara referred to the popular conception, gained from seeing her only on the screen, that she was a statuesque beauty, some nine feet tall and of tremendous weight. Actually, Miss Bara is of a slight, girlish figure; the beauty which has been reflected on the screen is as effective on the stage—black hair, drawn low over the temples; heavy-lidded eyes, a mobile mouth, and a full and exotic cast of countenance. This is the picture, incomplete without mention of Miss Bara's speaking voice, which is especially pleasing in the deeper tones.

That voice could not be heard to advantage the first night of "The Blue Flame," because, as Miss Bara explained, of a cold caught on Sunday night. After four weeks on the road, during which "The Blue Flame" had been played in Stamford, the traditional "dog," Washington, Pittsburgh and Boston, the company reached New York so close to the hour of the opening performance that it was necessary to hold the final rehearsal in the wee sma' hours of Monday morning. Straightway came shiverings and sneezes, and when Monday evening came Miss Bara's voice was sadly impaired, especially for those scenes wherein she was forced to call upon her deeper tones.

She confessed to great nervousness on the opening. Although this was not the first appearance of the screen star upon the speaking stage, it was the first time since she has created through her work on the screen her own particularly distinct type of part. She was graduated from a school of dramatic art and appeared for a short time upon the stage before going to the silent drama. Yet "The Blue Flame" brought the tense nerves of a première on Broadway. The greatest ovation of all came, she confessed, at a particularly awkward moment, and for a second she feared that she would be unable to proceed.

Miss Bara had not read the press criticisms of the opening when she was seen.

"They had to call out the police reserves in Boston, and the same thing will happen in New York, she said.

One who had seen the turbulent stream of humanity at the entrance of the Shubert Theater on Monday night could well comprehend the necessity for police reserves.

An interview with Theda Bara would be incomplete without a bit of a word for Petey, who replaces a dog lost recently by the star. Petey, Miss Bara explained, is a very proper sort of bull terrier, being half bull and half terrier. He had been very taciturn during the interview itself, adding nothing to the answers which his mistress gave to questions, but once the talk was done, Miss Bara allowed Petey to demonstrate that he, too, had a perfectly good speaking voice. Just to show his versatility Petey also walked the length of the short hall and sat up gravely to watch the departure of the Tribune man.

St. John Ervine

Vaudeville

PALACE—Joseph Santley and Ivy Sawyer will be headlined in 'Bits and Pieces," produced by Hassard Short. It is expected to establish a new standard in vaudeville for musical productions in tabloid form. William and Gordon Dooley will remain a second week, assisted by the Morin Sisters, as "Will the House of David Band." Harry Langdon will be seen in "Johnny's New Car," assisted by Rose and Cecil Langdon. Lily Lena, England's fashion plate comedienne, Joe Morris and Flo Campbell in the "Avi-Ate-Her," by Joseph L. Browning; Mme. Rialta and company, Stanley and Barnes and Berzac's Circus complete the program.

RIVERSIDE — Trixie Friganza, the Mosconi Brothers and family, Elizabeth M. Murray, Georgi Price and Gibson and Connelli are the principal stellar features. Gruber's Oriental Animal Spectacle, Eddie Foyer, Rome and Cullen and Seibini and Grovini complete the bill.

COLONIAL—Alice Lloyd, the English comedienne, will divide topline honors with Dolly Connolly, Ray Raymond and Percy Wenrich, a new combination of old favorites. Frank Dobson and his Sirens, Oliver and Olp, Walter Brower, Bert and Betty Wheeler, Foley and La Ture, Camilla's Birds and Black and White round out the bill.

EIGHTY-FIRST STREET—Amelia Stone and Armand Kaliz will top the bill. They will appear in a miniature light opera called "A Song Romance," written by Mr. Kaliz. Marshall Neilan's first picture from his own studios will be shown. It is "The River's End," from James Oliver Curwood's great story of the same name. Others on the bill will include Dickinson and Deagon, Laurel Lee, Ralph Dunbar's "Tennessee Ten," the Mageys and Wilson and Larson.

Nace Bonville, Only Original "Florodora" Principal To Play in 1920 Revival, Indulges in Reminiscences

The New Sextet for the 1920 "Florodora"
Madelene Richers, Vera Gibson, Muriel Lodge, Dama Sykes, Dorothy Leeds, Fay Evelyn, Marcella and Beatrice Swanson

ONLY because there was no other production ready to go on did "Florodora" remain at the Casino Theater during the first four weeks of its season in New York. People came to the theater and looked at the actors with sober faces as if to ask, "What are you doing on the stage?" All the humor in the play was English and was hardly understood here. Willie Edouin, an excellent English actor, who made a very humorous Tweedlepunch, had been away from America so long that he had forgotten what Americans expected. The principals in the company experimented nightly, put in their own business and humor, the play started to pick up speed, people came in, laughed, and "Florodora" was on the road to success.

Nace Bonville, who played Leandro in the first company and who will play the same part in the coming revival at the Century on April 5, was reminiscing. For one thousand consecutive performances he played in the musical comedy, during this time taking the part of Tweedlepunch for about six weeks.

"The only thing that saved 'Florodora' in the beginning was the sextet. From my place on the stage I could see men come in about the time when the sextet was to go on, take seats up front, stay until the sextet had appeared, and than go out again. They would watch the sextet intently and point out the various girls to their friends.

"During the run at the Casino the back doorman made enough money in tips from men who sent notes to the sextet girls to buy a house on Long Island. At the beginning of the run the audiences were made up mainly of men. The Casino had been known as a sort of 'leg show' theater and the women stayed away. But they were soon attracted by the costumes worn by the sextet girls. This was really the beginning of the show girl. The original sextet was hardly on for more than one night a week, but the understudies were as good as the absent ones. For private entertainments the sextet girls were much in demand and they made plenty of money this way.'

Some of the things Willie Edouin put in to give "Florodora" the comedy that it lacked were the knife and photograph episodes and the "drunk" scene.

"Have this to cement our friendship," Tweedlepunch would say, offering a knife.

The knife would not be accepted.

'Oh! You're superstitious," he would remark.

"No, it isn't that."

"Then give me something in return," he persisted.

So he received various sums of money in return for one of the many knives which he carried in his pocket until he came to Lady Hollyrood, who cast him a penny. Throughout the play he proffers his photograph instead of a visiting card. "Here's a picture of myself and dog—the one on the right is the dog," or similar remarks would accompany this bit of business.

In the "drunk" scene in front of the refreshment tent Mr. Bonville remembers that Tweedlepunch was especially funny. Although he discloses the whole plot, he does it so humorously that the secrets in his keeping remain safe until they are supposed to come out.

Mr. Bonville recalls difficulties backstage in the original production of "Florodora" because the technical appliances now in use had not yet been introduced. He was stage manager after Willie Edouin and Cyril Scott had held the position. In fact, so marked was his talent for stage direction that he received many offers for his services as a stage director after the completion of the run.

"In lighting especially is great improvement noted. The 'baby spots,' the lighting from above, have been introduced with effect. Side lighting in the old days was done with old-fashioned lamps in which two carbons came together and made the light. Unless they were carefully handled they spluttered dangerously, threw sparks over the stage and caused many fires. Since then the 1,000-watt electric lamp has come into use for side lighting with great saving in labor. For the old lamps one man was needed to take care of every lamp. Now we simply need enough men backstage to place and strike the lamps."

Bonville recalls that so new were some of the men in the male sextet that they were at a loss when told to make up for the opening night. To fill the breach, Bonville and some of the other experienced actors stepped in and showed them the art of make-up.

All of the advertising about "Florodora" told of the beauties of the sextet. The principals were neglected, and although they were glad to give the sextet all they deserved they were a little bit upset at the neglect.

"Principals were changed frequently, but 'Florodora' went on and on. Nothing could affect its popularity," Bonville said.

James A. Kiernan was once playing Tweedlepunch. One night he came into the dressing room which he and Bonville shared in the New York Theater. He had been out and came back without his voice. It was impossible for him to go on and the curtain call was only a half hour away. Kiernan's understudy, a young man who subsisted entirely on nuts, was nowhere to be found. Cyril Scott, who was stage manager then, conducted a frantic search, and he was finally found hiding behind a barrel and shaking like a leaf. He had lost his nerve.

"We can't send him on this way!" Scott shrieked. "What shall we do?" he asked.

Scott went back to the dressing room and saw Bonville.

"Do you know Tweedlepunch's part?"

"I know every part in the play," the Leandro answered. He had already finished making up and the curtain was about due to ring up.

"Well, then, you'll have to do Tweedlepunch to-night." And he did.

Tod Browning Brings His Own Big Picture, "Virgin of Stamboul," Across Continent to Show Here

Tod Browning, director for Universal, who directed "The Virgin of Stamboul," in which Priscilla Dean is starred, was unwilling to trust the negative of the picture in the hands of an ordinary messenger, and brought it East himself. Incidentally, the trip afforded Browning an opportunity for a brief vacation after eighteen weeks of work on this picture. Even on this semi-vacation he was unwilling to avoid work, for he devised and staged a prologue to the picture for its first showing at the Broadway Theater.

Eighteen weeks were spent on the picture because of the enormous amount of time necessary to obtain some of the light effects. In the beginning there was only the story, written by H. H. Van Loan, which gave the director three appealing characters and a romantic locale. The plot, according to Browning, is melodrama—that you can believe. These three characters and the minor ones were made to live their lives against the Oriental background.

"In the first place," said the director, "it was necessary to get the effect of reality. For that, practically every set that we used had to be built. The stuff couldn't be bought and it couldn't be hired, so we built it. Before that began I steeped myself in books about Turkey until I couldn't be told from a real Turk. When we began to build the sets I watched the real Turks in our cast, and they taught me what was realistic and what was not. By the time we had finished our workshop looked like Santa Claus's warehouse just before he starts on his annual round of distribution.

"By the way, in our whole cast, outside of the principals, I don't suppose that we had twenty-five Americans. The extras were Armenians or Turks, most of whom had been born in Turkey. They were shy on make-up, perhaps, but they were long on atmosphere."

One of the features of "The Virgin of Stamboul" is a camel race, and this unique feature was obtained through an unusual subterfuge. After working with camels for as long as he has, Browning declares them the stupidist of beasts; if these beasts of burden had been left to their own resources there never would have been a camel race. But nature and observation saved the day. The director had observed that these animals were much like sheep in their tendency to flock together. One of the camels in the cast was the mother of a young camel. This was the circumstance that suggested the calling in of nature. The baby camel was held captive near the camera and its mother taken, with the other camels, some thousand yards away. At the desired moment the mother was released, and she bore down on her captive infant with all the speed in her power, the others sweeping behind her like the tail of a comet. Thus was the camel race secured.

Another experience with these same animals convinced Browning that it was useless to coach them. The effect that he desired at this particular part of the picture was that the camel should turn his eye and wink at Priscilla Dean. To a person of average intelligence the mere suggestion of a wink in Miss Dean's direction should be sufficient, but the camel was obdurate; he could be induced to turn his eye, perhaps, but he would quite forget the wink, or he might succeed with the wink, but it would be in entirely the wrong direction. After vain coaching for nearly three days, one morning the camel became inspired and encompassed both the proper turn of the eye and the wink at the same time. There you have, in Browning's opinion, a perfect illustration of the nature of the beast.

Of another scene the Universal director says with pride that only two men were injured in taking it. It is one of the big scenes in the picture, where a combat between horsemen and men on foot in the narrow streets of the town is shown.

"The horsemen were equipped with sabers," explained Browning, "while the men on foot had the old Krag-Jorgensen rifles that were used in the Spanish-American War. There was no fake to that fight; out on the coast we have some of those rifles with cuts in their barrels from the blows of the saber so deep that a match could be laid in. One horsemen struck so fiercely that he cut through the barrel to the bore. There was plenty of realism to that fight scene. Yet there were only two men hurt, and neither of them seriously."

Nature's Co-operation Won By Braving Wintry Blasts In Making Yukon Picture

In making "The Law of the Yukon," a picture inspired by one of Robert W. Service's poems, Charles Miller, the director and producer of the picture, confesses to have received bountiful aid from Nature. Mr. Miller and his company reached Port Henry, in Northern New York, early in January, and within two weeks Nature had displayed a generosity in snow and zero weather that came to be the rule for nearly all of the nine weeks that the company used to make the picture.

"When I decided to make the picture," explained Mr. Miller, "I went along the Canadian border looking for a suitable location, and finally selected Port Henry, where some pictures had been made before. An advance force built the town called Gold City in the picture, including the big dance hall where so much of the action in the picture is laid.

"When the company reached Port Henry we found waiting for us a large number of 'extras.' In other words, the people living there were exactly the types that I needed to give atmosphere to the picture. For the courtroom scene, in which the 'extras' were told to 'get' three of the characters in the picture, they followed out their orders with a high degree of realism that would have been difficult for a trained actor to attain; some of those in my company bear scars to testify to this realism. In the dance hall, too, when these 'extras' were called upon to fill in at card tables or make a part of the dancing crowd, they didn't act all over the place."

Ten other very important "extras" that were engaged at Port Henry passed through a rigorous course of training at Mr. Miller's hands before they were ready to play the r parts in the picture. These we tan huskies, who give a touch true Alaskan atmosphere to the on scenes in collaboration with dog sled. With the company when reached Port Henry were several men familiar with Alaska and its ways, and these men aided Mr. Miller in training the huskies. These huskies were so soon broken to harness that the biggest snowfall of the winter found them ready to help out the government. Mail delivery by ordinary methods blocked by deep drifts, the trainers of these dogs merely whispered in their several attentive ears "The United States mail must go through" and Port Henry received its mail.

Nearly a third of the story of "The Law of the Yukon" is told against the background of the mounded drift and snow-encrusted forests near Port Henry. At the time of the in ew Mr. Miller showed on the scree me of the scenes of the film play in great clouds of vaporous breath that came from the mouths of the players would convince the most skeptical onlooker that the trees were not, after all, merely skillfully decked in absorbent cotton. The director admitted that his company had early developed the proper attitude toward the weather. The thirty-six-degree-below-zero days that had descended upon them early in January made them able to walk about with cool and casual comments, throats thrown open, in the comparative torridity of the days when the mercury only ducked its head slightly below the zero mark.

All of this work of Nature was gratefully made use of by Mr. Miller, of course, but his belief in the quality of the picture that he made at Port Henry goes beyond a merely thankful gesture in the direction of Nature. Exceptionally good photography, made possible by the presence of two excellent cameramen in his company, enabled him, he believes, to bring out the beauties of the exterior scenes, the full possibilities of his interiors and the emotional power of June Elvidge, who is featured in this film. There was an arduous period of rehearsal as well. One of the cardinal principles of this director is that his actors and actresses must know their parts well enough to act them without the constant intervention of the director.

His experience on the speaking stage, covering years as actor, manager and producer, has brought him to the production of motion pictures with an exact knowledge of what he can reasonably expect from his cast. This long stage experience, which probably no other director shares with Mr. Miller, leads him to demand thought as the first contribution by a cast to t production of a picture.

Beyond the technique of photography and directing and casting, Mr. Miller has what he believes a virile and gripping story, unfolding the basic law of the Yukon "that only the weak shall perish." There is sufficient action and suspense, he feels, to guarantee success for the film.

In "The Rise of Silas Lapham"

James K. Hackett as Silas